

Library Strategy Consultation 2019

Feedback Report

November 2019



1. Background and Methodology

Shropshire Council highlighted the need for a new library strategy following a period of significant financial change. The current strategy is based on a three-tier hierarchy of library services to inform how resources are financed and managed. That hierarchy will continue to underpin funding decisions to ensure library services are sustainable for the future. However, a refreshed strategy can offer a robust vision with clear priorities for the library service of the future.

To obtain feedback to inform the development of a new strategy, an engagement plan was designed to include 2 periods of consultation:

- Stage 1 (six weeks) - open questions to obtain feedback from local people concerning what they would like the strategy to focus on.
- Stage 2 (Six weeks) - a copy of the draft strategy to see if any amendments and changes are needed prior to final agreement and sign off.

The first phase of engagement opened on the 1 October 2019 and closed on 10 November 2019. Members of the public and stakeholders could choose to provide feedback in a range of ways:

- By completing a survey
- By email and postal feedback for any more detailed comments
- By attending one of the roadshows held during National Libraries Week:
 - Monday 7 October 10am to 3/4pm – Oswestry Library
 - Tuesday 8 October 10am to 3pm – Bridgnorth Library
 - Wednesday 9 October 10am to 3pm – Ludlow Library
 - Thursday 10 October 10am to 3pm – Shrewsbury Library
 - Friday 11 October 10am to 1pm – Whitchurch Library
 - Friday 11 October Library 1pm to 4pm – Market Drayton

The consultation survey was designed to find out:

- How libraries are currently being used (to support existing data held by the service)
- Why people use libraries and which library services people most
- What prevents people using library services
- How satisfied library users are with current services
- Whether there are any areas of dissatisfaction and requested improvements
- Changes people would like to see in the future
- What people would like to see included in the next library strategy

It should be noted that there was a problem with a small number of surveys. Some of the paper surveys had been stapled incorrectly and the back page was the wrong way around. This meant that some of the paper copy respondents from Oswestry area (approximately 33 people) did not complete some questions including the question about their ideal library of the future and what they would like to see in the Library Strategy.

2. Consultation Respondents

In any consultation it is important to understand the characteristics of those who have responded. This understanding can allow any gaps to be filled and additional targeted engagement to take place. Shropshire Council works to ask key equality and diversity monitoring questions within its

public consultations. This helps identify whether relevant groups within the community have been adequately included in the consultation and whether the respondents are representative of the wider community.

909 people completed a survey, either online, or at their local library. A significant number of paper surveys were used to ensure that people had a choice of how to respond (many people would prefer not to complete online surveys). The response from local communities during the 6 week period was fantastic, not only did large numbers of people complete a survey but they provided comprehensive responses to questions and most took the time to complete detailed comments. All 2,677 comments have been read and each one tagged with the main themes. This report also includes example comments to better illustrate the type of comments received.

Chart 1 shows that most of those responding to the stage 1 engagement were members of the public (752), followed by library volunteers (32) and voluntary and community sector groups and organisations (18). 25 people also provided other roles and they included friends of library groups, librarians, parents, teachers, authors and small businesses.

Chart 1 Survey respondents by type

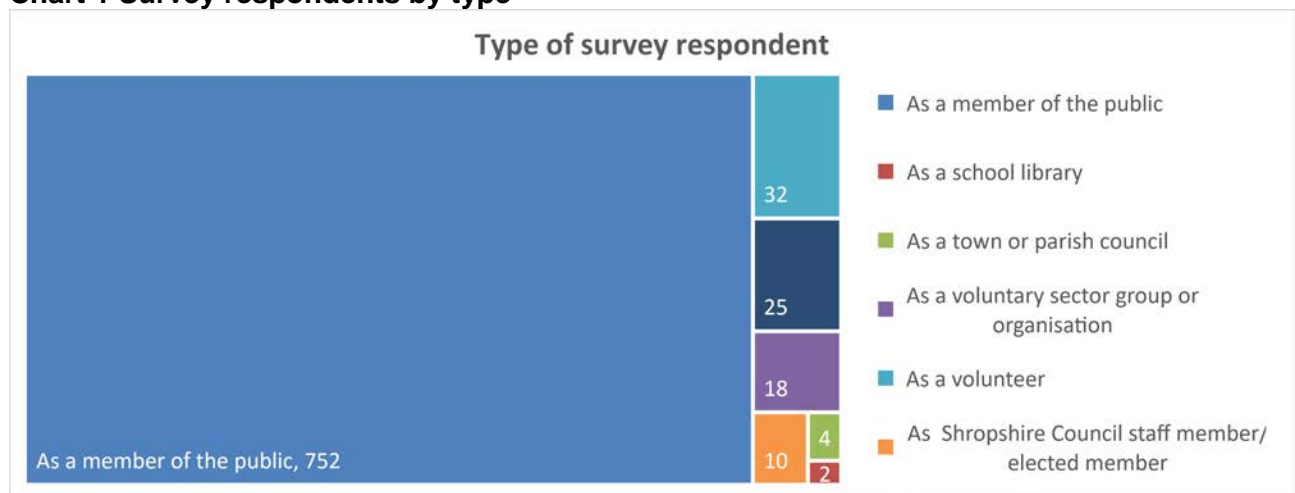
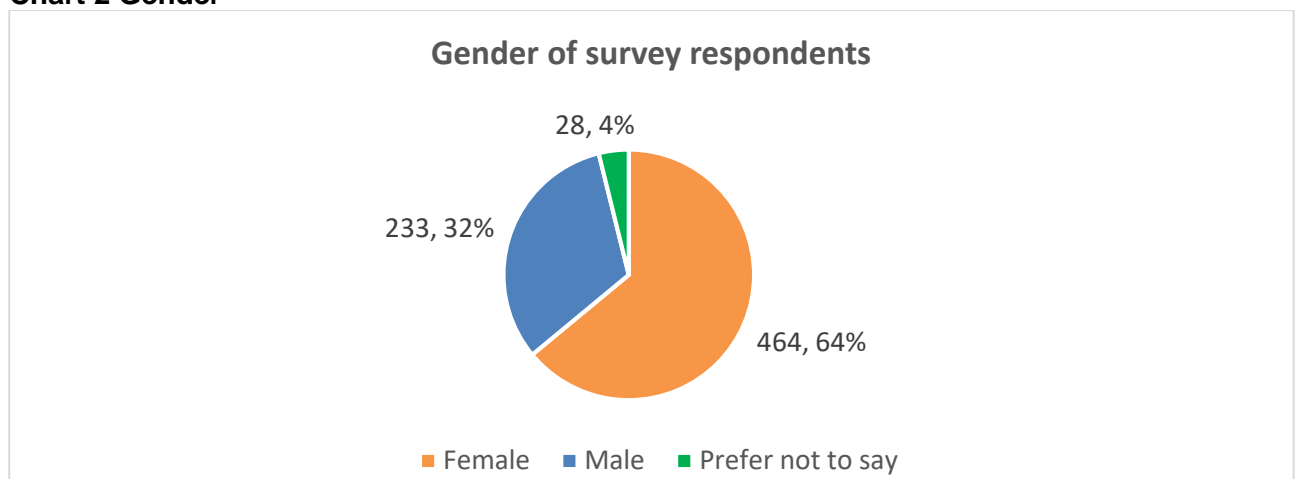


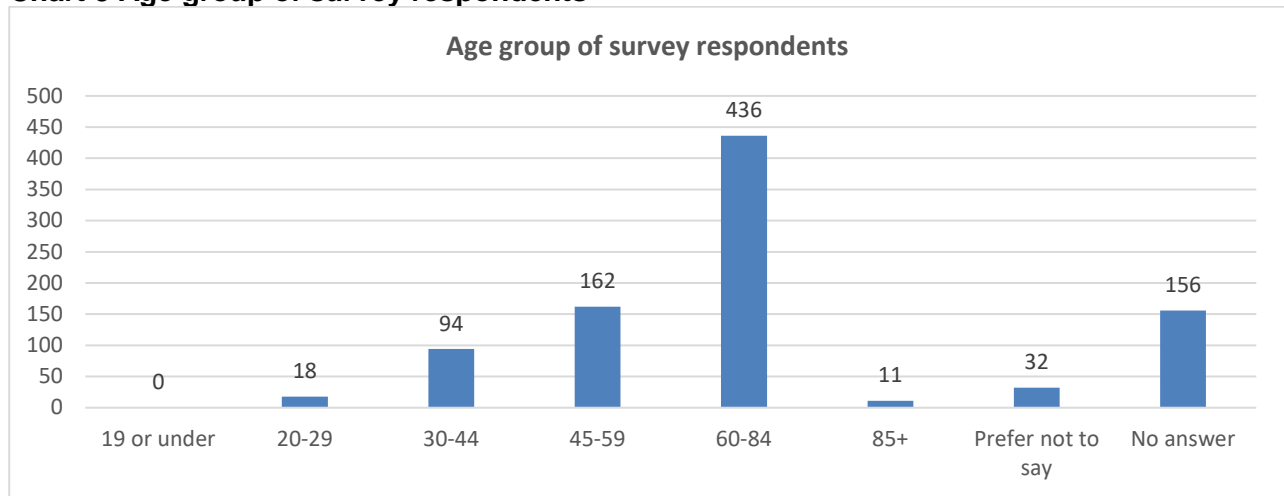
Chart 2 highlights that more women responded to the survey than men. 184 people chose not to answer the question so there could have been a number of male respondents within that group. None of the equality and diversity questions within surveys are mandatory, it is recognised that people may not wish to provide personal information and there are clear explanations to explain why Shropshire Council collects the data and that people may choose not to respond. Overall there were responses from both genders, but it is worth bearing in mind, particularly in advance of the stage 2 consultation that men have been slightly underrepresented in the first part of the engagement on the new library survey.

Chart 2 Gender



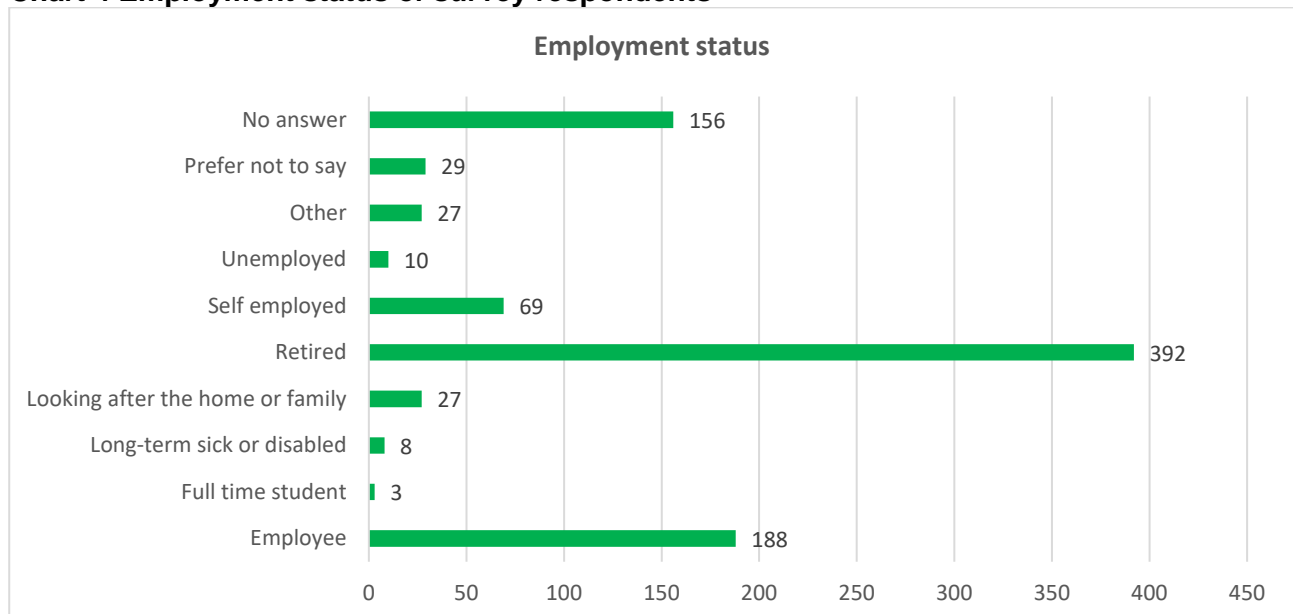
Libraries seek to provide services to all age groups within the community and Chart 3 highlights which age groups were involved in responding to the survey. There were no responses from those under the age of 19 and only 2% were in the 20 - 29 year olds age group. The largest group of respondents (48%) were aged 60-84.

Chart 3 Age group of survey respondents



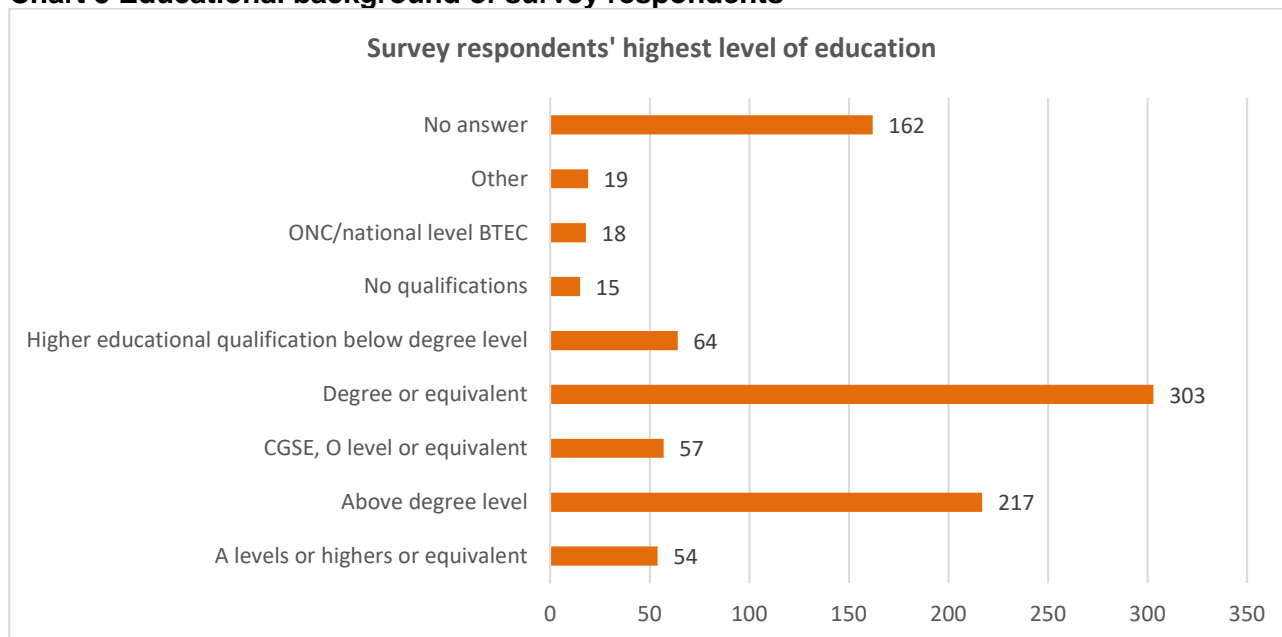
Considering the employment status of survey respondents, it is possible to see that 43% of those engaged in the survey were retired, 29% were employed or self-employed. This links to some of its helpful context for the feedback and comments received through the survey.

Chart 4 Employment status of survey respondents



Libraries have an important role in our communities in terms of education and literacy. An additional question was included as a result to ask 'What is the highest level of education you have completed?' Chart 5 displays the results. This feedback is helpful and can help the Library Service to understand whether people of all academic levels are using libraries and responding to the consultation. The feedback suggests that survey respondents are educated to a high level. 33% have degrees of equivalent qualifications and 24% are educated above degree level, so in total 57% have degrees or higher qualifications. Further analysis by age group, highlights that age wasn't an influencing factor in educational background and there are a mix of ages within each educational level grouping.

Chart 5 Educational background of survey respondents



Other questions used to understand diversity of respondents included questions asking about disability and ethnicity. 9% of people responded to say they have a long-standing illness or disability that limits their daily activity. It is helpful to know that these survey respondents were included in the sample (the comments do include references to different accessibility needs and provide very helpful feedback). Considering ethnicity shows that 75% of respondents were White (British, Irish, Polish, gypsy or Irish traveller, other white). 1% were from a different ethnic grouping and the remainder chose not to respond to the question.

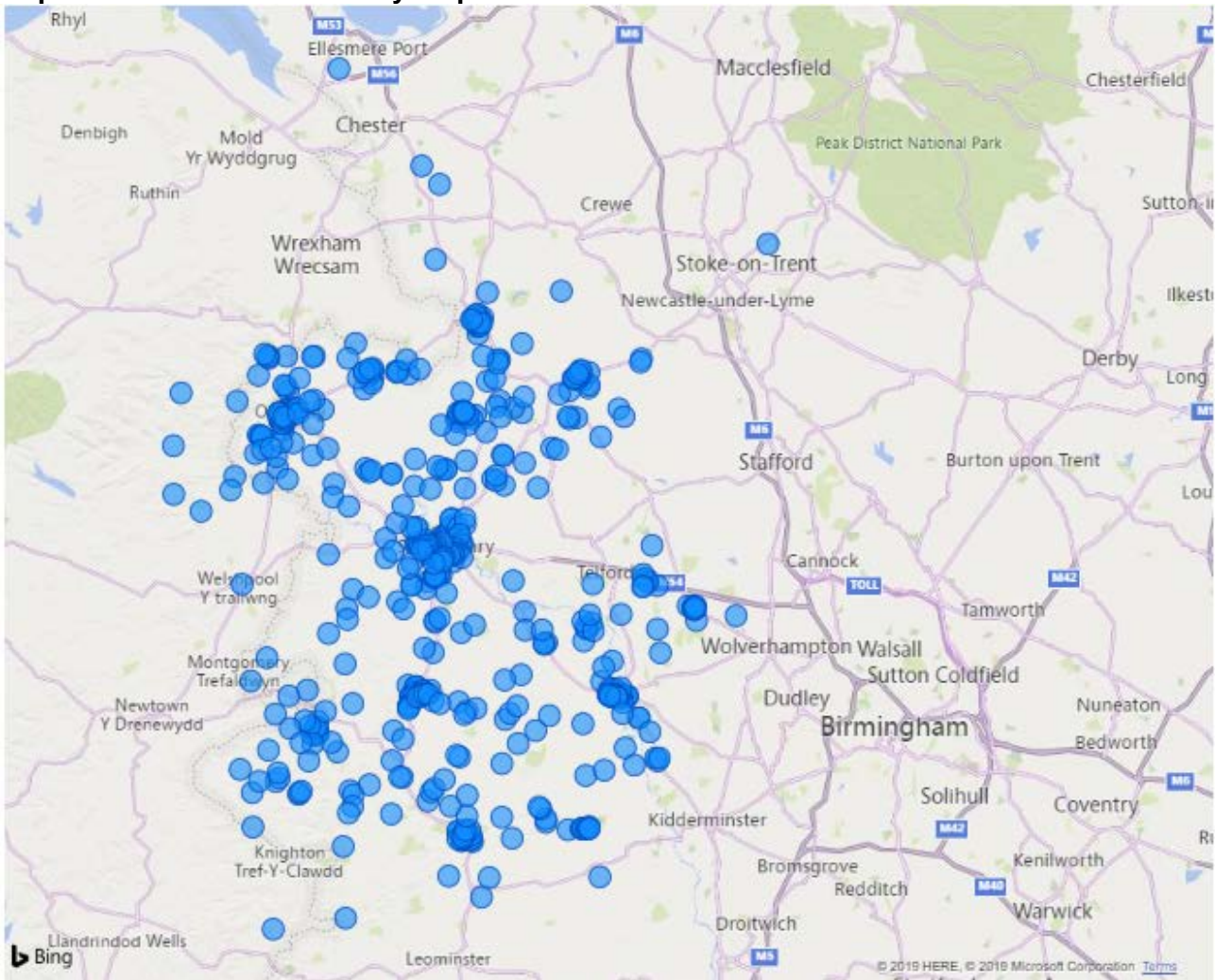
Shropshire Council places a strong emphasis on ensuring people of all characteristics can influence change as part of consultation processes. It should be noted that in order to ensure any future policy or service changes do not negatively impact on people of different characteristics and backgrounds, Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessments (ESIAs) are undertaken. An ESIA will be completed as part of the consultation and the stage 2 engagement process allows for any engagement gaps to be filled.

The final question used to understand characteristics was location. In a large rural county it is important to ensure that people from across Shropshire have had the opportunity to participate in any consultation. Map 1 displays where survey respondents live.

Map 1 highlights that a very good spread of responses was received from across the county and slightly further afield with additional responses within areas surrounding Shropshire to all sides. This suggests that people are travelling from out of area to visit Shropshire's libraries as well as use by local residents. Oswestry, Market Drayton and Whitchurch libraries catchment areas seems to extend over the borders more than perhaps others do. A few locations have not been included on the map but the analysis highlights that a small number of people responding to the survey live in other locations in the UK including near to Hereford, Weston-Super-Mare, London, Bangor and Hartlepool.

Postcodes have also been used to analysis the data against other responses and where findings are significant these are included as maps elsewhere in the report.

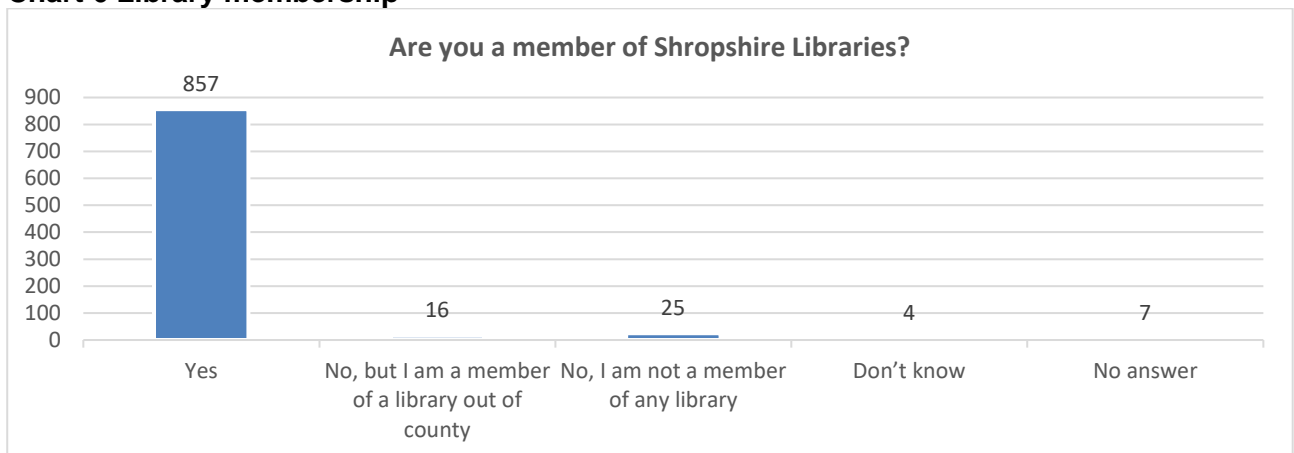
Map 1 Home location of survey respondents



3. Current use of libraries

The survey included a number of questions designed to better understand how people are currently using the libraries so that information, alongside other sources, may inform the next library strategy. The results reflect the fact that most respondents were current library users and not many people completed the online survey as non-library users. When asked ‘Are you a member of Shropshire Libraries?’ 94% responded ‘yes’. Chart 6 displays the results.

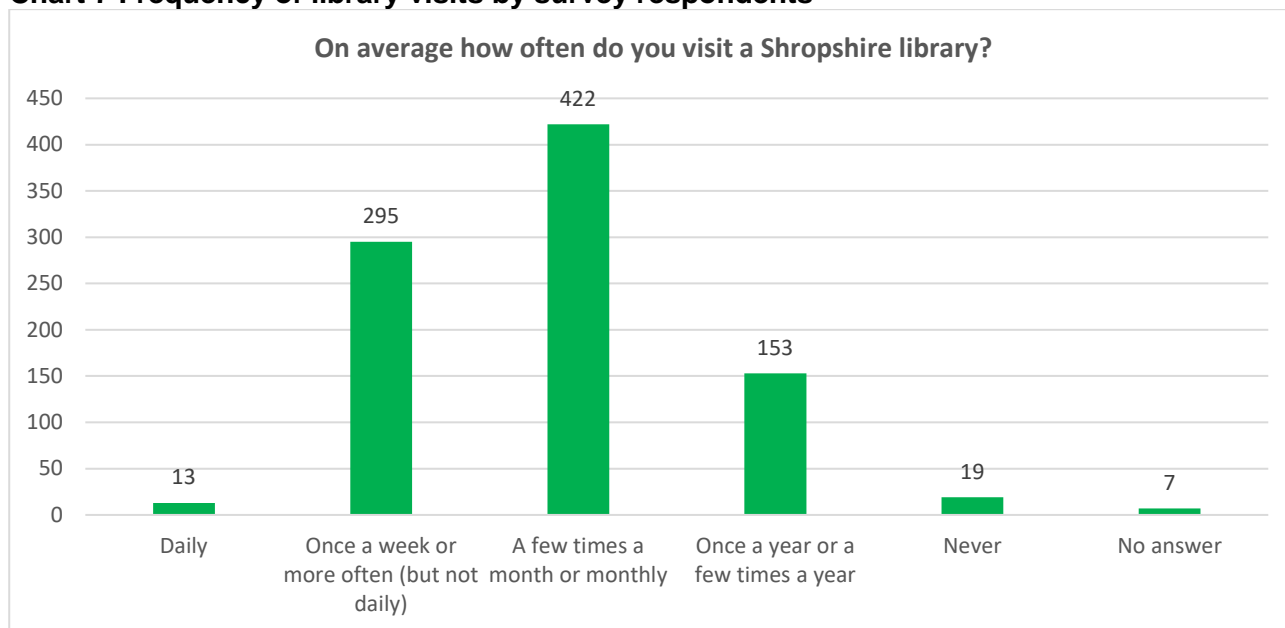
Chart 6 Library membership



The overwhelming response from members of Shropshire Libraries means survey respondents have the knowledge and experience to be able to provide informed feedback about library services.

The survey also asked ‘On average, how often do you visit a Shropshire library?’. There were 8 categories provided but a few of those have been combined to simplify the feedback and make Chart 7 easier to interpret. 80% of all respondents visit a library at least once a month (34% of those once a week or more). Only 19 (2%) of the 909 survey respondents never visit a Shropshire library. This highlights that not only were most survey respondents members of Shropshire Libraries but they are also frequent users.

Chart 7 Frequency of library visits by survey respondents



Map 2 and Table 1 have been used to show which libraries the survey respondents visit. The results highlight that some of the survey respondents use more than one library. 247 of the survey respondents visit Shrewsbury Library (20%), followed by Oswestry Library (11%), Ludlow Library (8%) and Church Stretton Library (8%). All of the libraries were represented by users within the survey responses, including the mobile libraries.

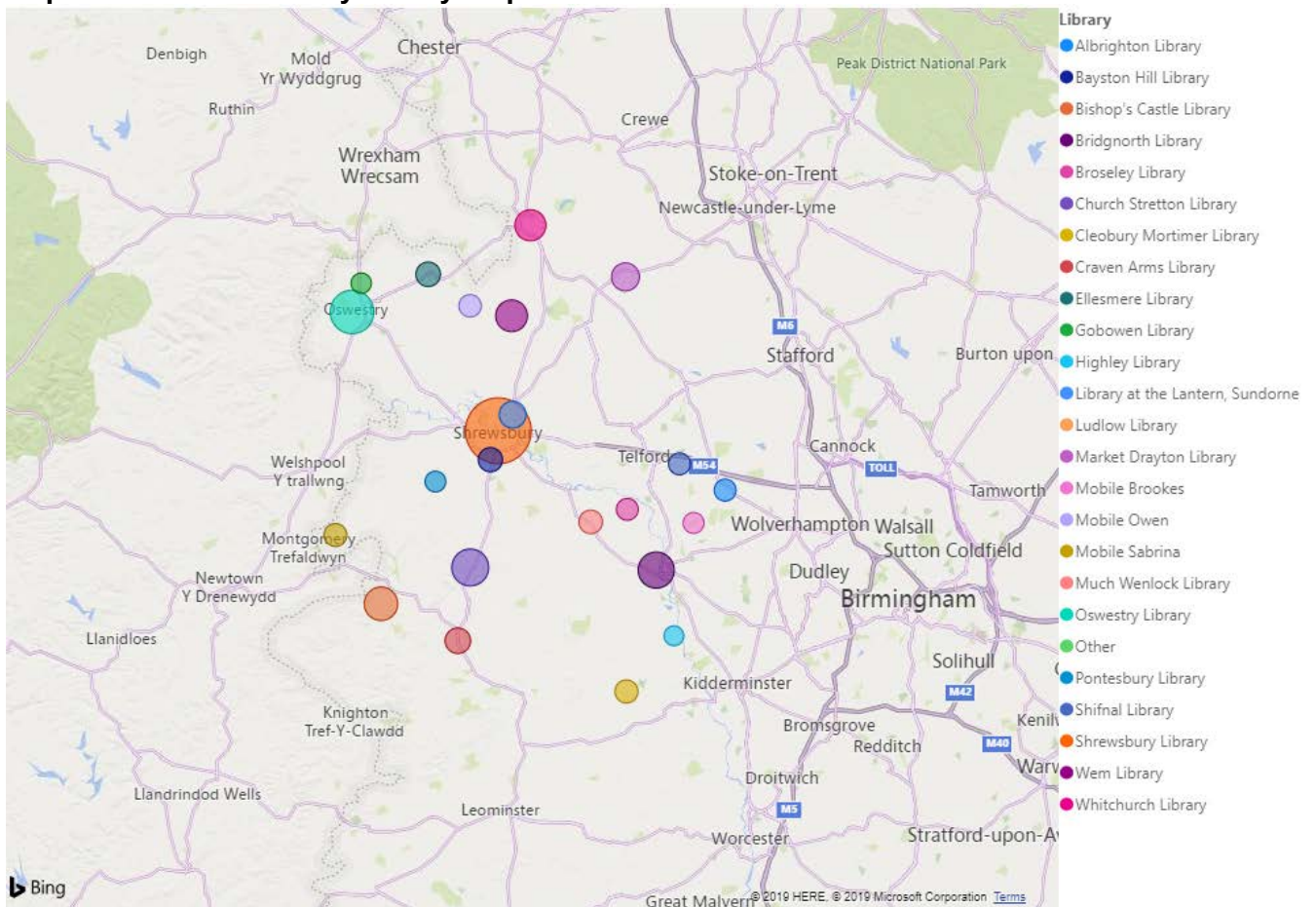
Table 1 Libraries visited by survey respondents

Library	Number	%	Library	Number	%
Albrighton Library	16	1	Market Drayton Library	48	4
Bayston Hill Library	28	2	Much Wenlock Library	25	2
Bishop’s Castle Library	77	6	Oswestry Library	130	11
Bridgnorth Library	91	7	Pontesbury Library	10	1
Broseley Library	16	1	Shrewsbury Library	247	20
Church Stretton Library	95	8	Shifnal Library	16	1
Cleobury Mortimer Library	22	2	Wem Library	68	5
Craven Arms Library	35	3	Whitchurch Library	64	5
Ellesmere Library	30	2	Mobile Brookes	11	1
Gobowen Library	8	1	Mobile Owen	19	2
Highley Library	5	0	Mobile Sabrina	21	2
Library at the Lantern, Sundorne	42	3	Other	19	2
Ludlow Library	95	8	Total	1238	100

The mobile libraries have been mapped on to Map 2 by choosing one location to represent them (Mobile Brookes was mapped at its Badger stop, Mobile Owen at its English Frankton stop, and Mobile Sabrina at its Chirbury stop). There was no particular reason for choosing these locations to map the mobile library use over any other locations – the aim was just to include mobile libraries by allocating locations to the north, west and east of the county. The map of mobile library stops can be found on the library webpages here: <https://shropshire.maps.arcgis.com> The aim of Map 2 was to show volumes of survey respondents as users of libraries and the size of each circle represents the numbers of users.

It should be noted that the ‘other’ category (19 survey respondents selected that they use other services) are not included on Map 2. Other includes the online services, Book club services at Shirehall, archives and out of area services.

Map 2 Libraries visited by survey respondents



The survey asked people why they visit libraries. It is not at all surprising to find that the main reason for visiting is to read, borrow or return books and other library items (81% of survey respondents selected this response). Other reasons for visiting were also selected by large numbers of people. 268 people visit a library to participate in groups/events, 274 to access information/advice services and 192 to use a library computer or the Wi-Fi. Chart 8 displays the results.

An open question was included within the survey in case anything had been missed from the list provided. The survey asked ‘Are there any other main reasons you visit the library?’. It was anticipated that not many people would respond with additional reasons for visiting but 89 people provided written comments. Within those 89 comments there were some key themes and Table 2 summarises the themes.

Chart 8 Reasons survey respondents visit libraries

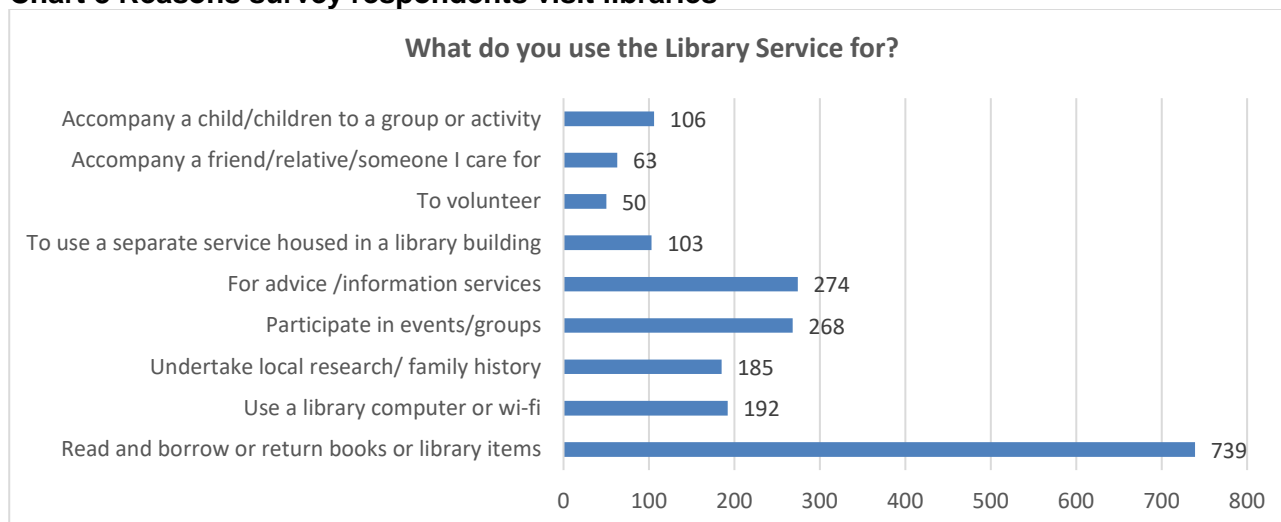


Table 2 Comment Themes - Other things people use their library for

Theme	Number	%
To read (including newspapers)	18	19
Art and other exhibitions	11	11
To study/ work	10	10
To run a group/ display information	10	10
To attend talks/ meet people	8	8
For research	8	8
To print/ photocopy	7	7
Reading group/writing group/ book club	6	6
To read notice board	5	5
To borrow for other people	4	4
Other	10	10
Total	97	100%

Table 2 highlights that some people included multiple themes/points within the comments they provided. The most common point made was that people like to visit a library to browse and read, this was followed by viewing art or exhibitions, to study/work and to run a group or display information. Example comments are included below:

Example comments: Other reasons people visit a library

- *The library is a lifeline for me. My husband has dementia and I cannot focus or concentrate at home. The library provides a quiet haven with Wi Fi and coffee where I can relax and have peace to work or read.*
- *Cleobury library has provided services I could not access elsewhere in the locality, together with professional impartial support, access to computers and printing. I use it to support my leisure reading needs and have requested books from the catalogue on a regular basis. These enable me to better support my mental health.*
- *As a local archaeologist, historian and artist, the library is more than just about the books it holds - although their local history collection is an invaluable resource that is not duplicated elsewhere. The library is a hub for meeting with others interested in local history, as well as connecting with new artists and library volunteers. As a hub for community involvement, the Library has been absolutely key to me meeting new people who share my interests and furthering both community participation and jobs opportunities. It is no exaggeration to say that I would not be half so much a part of the Oswestry community - as an archaeologist, artist or volunteer - if it wasn't for the way the Library works to bring people together.*

- *Useful notices of local events on display in the hallway. Somewhere quiet away from the noisy world we seem to have created outside.*
- *Most of my reading is done in the library itself. I do research into my hobbies there and also make notes while I am there, I probably spend 1hr to 2 hrs there at a time.*
- *To see the small art and craft exhibitions there. To browse and relax.*
- *I am a housing support officer and am one of the staff from our team who provide an advice and support drop-in at Bridgnorth library. I also use the library on occasions separate to the drop-in, as a meeting place with clients, particularly for new clients (a safe place to meet) and also when we have work to complete that requires internet access.*

Not having anticipated such good feedback under the ‘other category on the question ‘What do you use the Library Service for?’ question, an open-ended comment box was included on the survey to capture other feedback about use of libraries with the question ‘Are there any other main reasons you visit the library?’ 161 people made comments and the results are shown in Table 3. Some people made more than one pain point within their answer. The main themes within responses were categorised and the results shown below.

Table 3 Comment Themes – Reasons for visiting the library

Theme	Number	%
Social interaction/ clubs/ groups	45	25
Information	25	14
Environment / quiet place	17	10
Children's books and activities	15	8
Range and quality of books	14	8
Research/ study/ work	12	7
Printing and other council services	12	7
Read newspapers / magazines	7	4
Exhibitions	6	3
Toilet	5	3
Hearing aid service	2	1
Other	17	10
Total	177	100%

The top reason for visiting a library was for social interaction/to attend clubs/groups, followed by to obtain information. The comments were really interesting to read and some examples are included below.

Example comments: Reasons for visiting a library

- *Browsing for books I might wish to borrow and read, something which is not possible to do online at sufficient depth.*
- *It is a pleasant place to meet other people and chat and keep up to date with the community.*
- *To interact with other people. Very important when you are elderly and live alone. The staff are always friendly and welcoming - ready to help anyone with a problem.*
- *To sometimes browse books/purchase a book from the books for sale table. Supervise grandchildren selecting a book to take home and to view noticeboards and displayed art work.*
- *I love libraries & they have made a huge difference to my happiness & Wellbeing. I have benefitted from many years of access to wonderful books and information, so have all my family.*
- *To find out about local events. To use reference library. To use photocopier. To read papers and publications. To get stimulation about what to read.*
- *When my wife is shopping in Shrewsbury, if I can, I retreat to the Central Library. Sanity in a mad world..*

- *Talking books for elderly blind relative. This service has been essential in keeping her cheerful and engaged with literature. Excellent.*
- *To introduce my child to library services and keep her interested in reading.*

4. Feedback on library services

Many of the questions used within the survey were designed to obtain feedback from library users. This feedback is an important part of the information that can inform the next Library Strategy. The 909 survey respondents provided comprehensive responses and many helpful comments. One important question was included to obtain an overarching view of how people feel about the Library Services: 'Overall, how do you rate Shropshire's library services?'. Chart 9 shows the results.

Chart 9 Survey respondents' overall feedback for Shropshire's library services

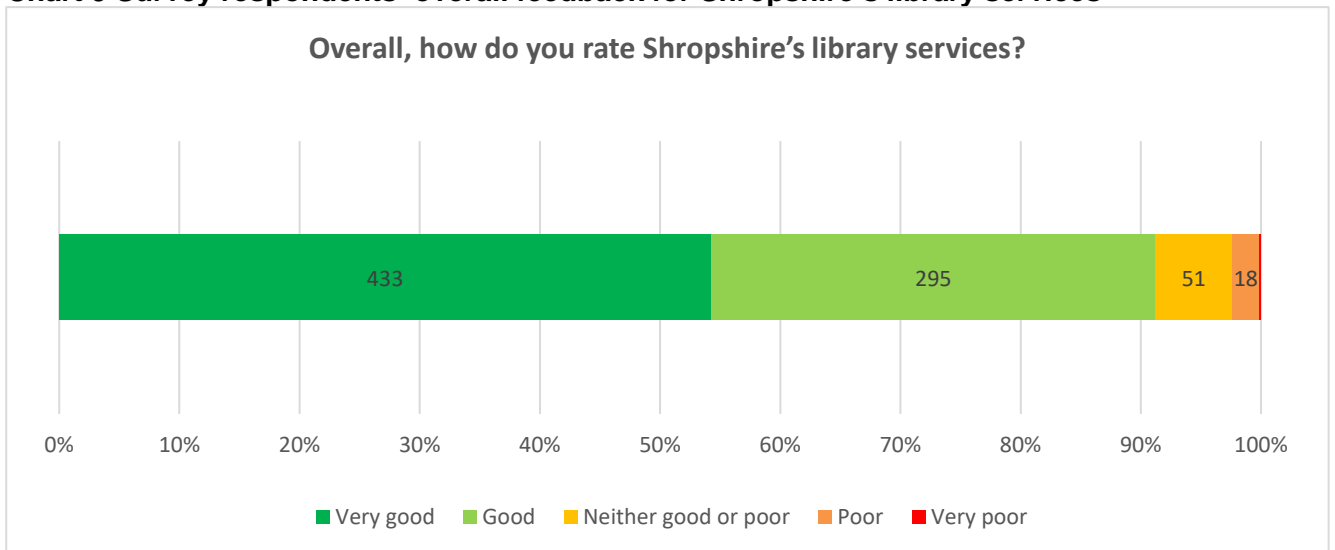


Chart 9 highlights the overwhelmingly positive response received. 80% of those who responded to the survey rated the library services as very good (48%) or good (32%). 18 people (2%) selected poor and 1 (0.11%) very poor. 6% didn't have an opinion and 12% did not answer the question (109 people).

Additional analysis was undertaken against this feedback to see if there were any characteristics that influenced the feedback provided. Analysis was undertaken against how often people visit libraries. This highlighted that frequency of visits did not really influence opinion. Frequency of visits varies among the 19 people who rated library services poor or very poor (1 person), with the 19 visiting at varying frequencies spread across the categories provided. Similarly, analysis was undertaken by mapping responses and this didn't show any pattern. Those who rate library services as poor/very poor, live in different locations across the county and do not share the same local libraries.

To gain a more detailed understanding of feedback on library services, survey respondents were asked to rate different elements of service. Chart 10 contains the results. The different elements of service asked about included customer services, buildings/space, the collection, online services and other services provided.

Chart 10 Survey respondents' feedback for key elements of library services

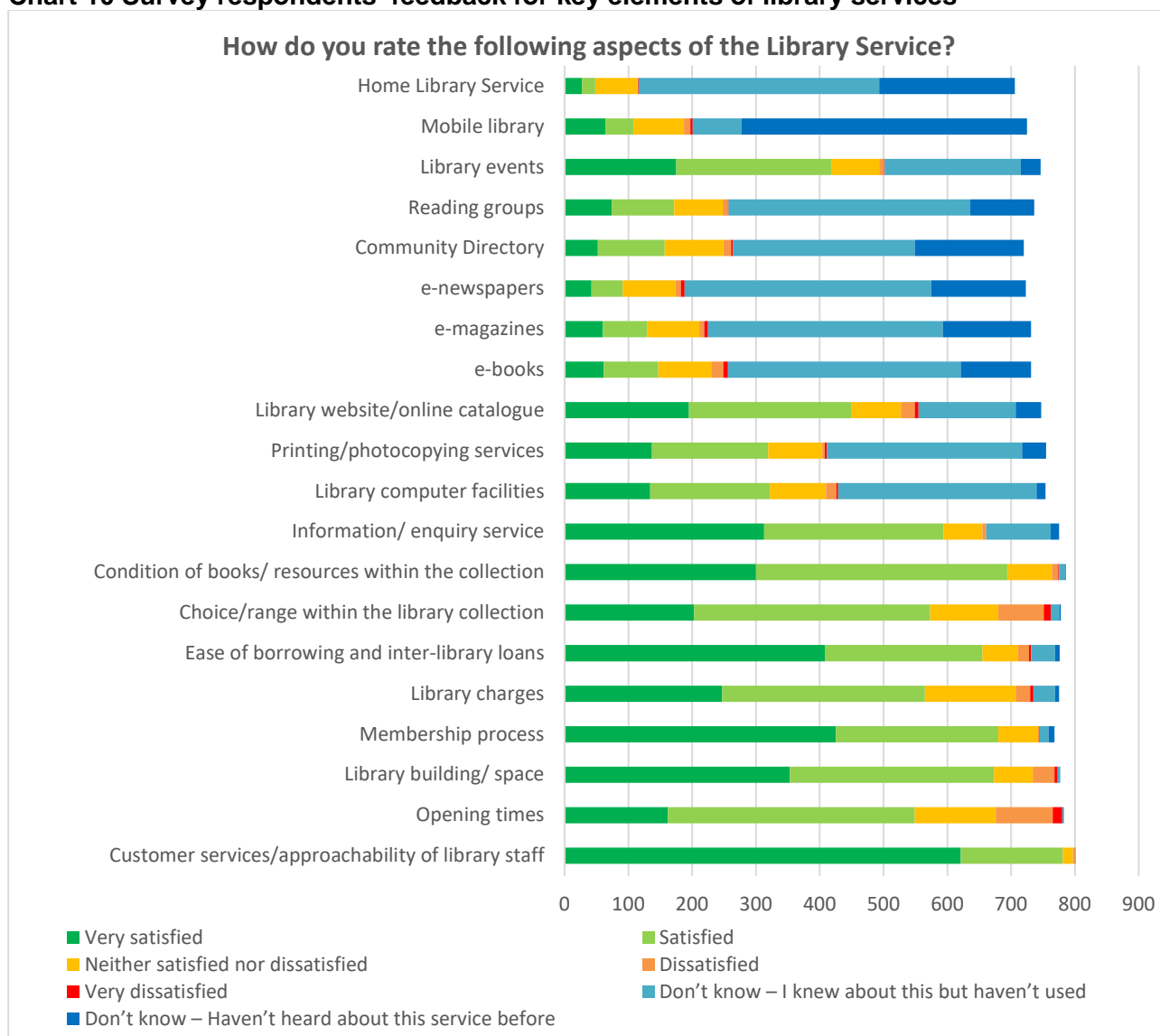


Chart 10 supports the results shown in Chart 9 highlighting overall satisfaction with all elements of library services. The feedback is very helpful and indicates where use of library services is lower among the survey respondents and where survey respondents hadn't heard of services. In particular, knowledge of/awareness of the mobile library, home library service, community directory, e-magazines, e-newspapers and e-books is lower compared to other services. Levels of dissatisfaction are greater for opening times, choice/range within the library service, library building/space, library charges and the library website/online catalogue than for other services. Levels of satisfaction are greatest for customer services/approachability of library staff, and condition of library resources.

To obtain a little more feedback on any areas of dissatisfaction, survey respondents were asked 'If you are 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' with any services, please explain why.' 187 people left comments. For this question, many people listed multiple reasons for dissatisfaction within their answers. By far the most commonly mentioned issue was dissatisfaction with library opening times/hours followed by limited choice/range/new materials within the collection. The example comments really help to highlight how people are feeling about the library service. Although satisfaction is very high overall, the issues that people aren't happy about are shared concerns and not restricted to one or two individuals but form more widespread community feedback. It should be noted that 3% of the comments (7 comments) were not really expressing dissatisfaction at all but were either positive or neutral in nature.

Table 4 Comment Themes – Reasons for dissatisfaction with services

Theme	Number	%
Opening hours	73	28
Choice/range/new materials	64	24
Loss of library space	19	7
Quality of online service/materials	19	7
Inter-library loans and charges	17	6
Mobile library service	12	5
Computer facilities and Wi-Fi	10	4
Quality of building and facilities	9	3
Impact of cuts/austerity in general	7	3
Other	27	10
Positive or neutral comments	7	3
Total	264	100%

Example comments: Reasons for selecting ‘dissatisfied or very dissatisfied’.

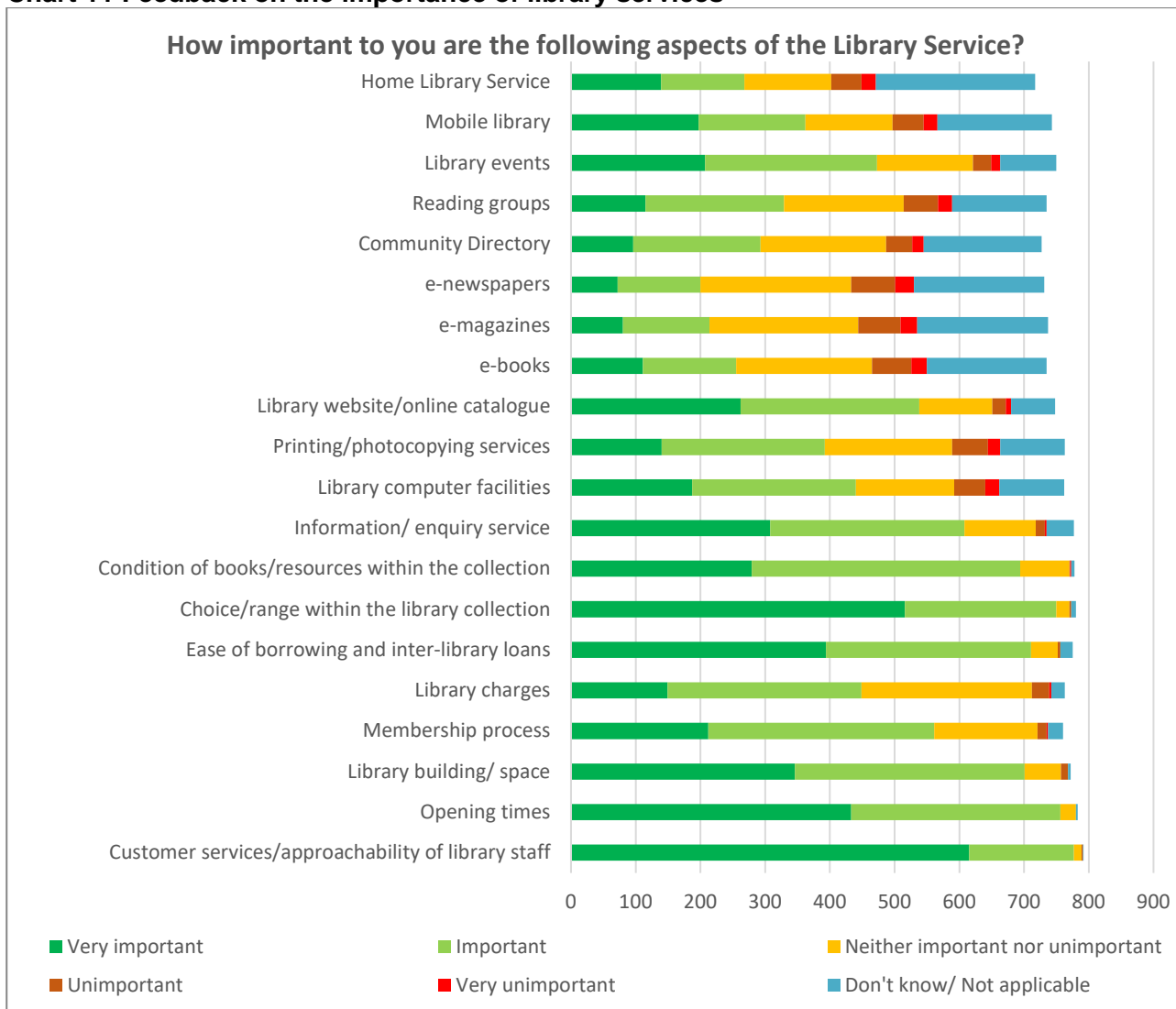
- *I like the majority of the workforce, work 9-5, Mon-Fri, so the only time I can visit my local library is on a Saturday morning. Not very inclusive unless you are an OAP or not working.*
- *The library times were cut on the last review. Very difficult to return books if you work. Range of books, a lot of series where there is only one! So, either stock is not being replenished when books are discarded, or stock is generally not been increased. The online catalogue often the search will be fruitless on the title but will bring up a whole list of books by the author including the one you’ve just searched for. E-books! Didn’t know you did these, have never seen them in the catalogue, where are they? E-magazines are great, but the reader software doesn’t always work.*
- *Need more evening opening times. Audiobooks are too expensive to borrow, you might as well buy it on Ebay or Amazon, used prices are similar to borrowing.*
- *I am severely site impaired and have found that there has been a limited number of audiobooks which I have been interested in. Also, not sure if the books are all accessible have tried this book found it difficult to access so did not bother again. Also do not know if the computers in the library have accessible software.*
- *The choice of books is very limited, and I think it is unfair that just because my local library is so small I have to pay every time I order a book from another Shropshire Library. I think there should be an OPAC in the Library so that users can search the catalogue on the premises. At the moment I have to do that at home, and I worry that children and young people are not learning how to do searches for when they go into Higher Education. Finally, the Shropshire catalogue is extremely basic with no keywords and just reviews from other readers rather than proper bibliographic information.*
- *The area available for book display was cut once the ground floor was taken away. This naturally results in a huge loss of choice - this doesn’t affect me because I order books from other libraries but throughout Shropshire there are some books and authors not available.*
- *I returned to Shrewsbury 4 years ago after living in a vibrant modern city in Australia. The libraries there were an amazing public resource and stood very proudly as a service that was helping to grow and shape individuals & communities. They were viewed as critical to a civilised modern society. They weren’t stuffy old-fashioned places, made sure they catered for all ages & types of people, & the general attitude was one of positive engagement & proactive creative services e.g.: international guest speakers & authors with wine & nibbles for a very small fee, clubs & community events, school visits, story time for pre-schoolers & elderly, homework & revision help. Support with computer learning, learning to read or English as a 2nd language etc. Obviously, funding makes a huge difference but that can improve when attitudes & expectations change it’s amazing what can happen with creative drive.*
- *Library web pages are not easy to find and use. Have a clunky, poorly designed feel. Layout and sometimes wording are unhelpful. Know from other library service websites/pages that it*

can be better than this. Use slightly larger print, more colour, more space, and more friendly, simpler text.

- Computer facilities are somewhat out of date and prone to crashing etc. Website is not easy to use or locate library pages. Common complaint we hear is that mobile libraries do not always turn up and notification is not sent to regular borrowers.
- It is evident that library services in Shropshire are seriously underfunded.

Another theme explored within the survey was how important particular library services are to people. This helps to develop a better understanding of how library users would prioritise services. Chart 11 is similar in style to Chart 10 and included the same list of services for consistency.

Chart 11 Feedback on the importance of library services



The results included in Chart 11 highlight that the top 5 services survey respondents believe are most important are: customer services/approachability of library staff, opening times, choice/range within the library collection, ease of borrowing and inter-library loans; and the library building/ space. The services considered least important are e-newspapers, e-magazines, e-books, reading groups and printing/photocopying services.

The survey asked 'Is there anything you don't like about library services, or anything that stops you visiting as often as you would like?' This question was designed to understand if there are any barriers preventing people from using library services and any issues that may need to be addressed through the new library strategy. There were 261 comments and a few people made more than one point. Table 5 summarises the feedback received.

Table 5 Comment Themes – Barriers to using library services

Theme	Number	%
Restricted opening hours	134	48
Limited choice/ range/ new books	34	12
Building facilities/ not enough space/ toilets etc.	16	6
Noise/ too busy	10	4
Distance/ challenge travelling there	10	4
Lack of parking/ cost of parking	8	3
Reservation costs/ other charges	8	3
Would like more groups/events	7	2
Impact of cuts in the service	5	2
Mobile visits short/limited	4	1
Limited computer facilities	2	1
Lack of self-service/return box	2	1
Waits/ borrowing from other areas	2	1
Other	20	7
Nothing don't like	19	7
Total	281	100%

7% of all the feedback included comments to suggest there is nothing people don't like about the library services they receive; there was some very nice feedback and a few examples have been included below. By far the greatest barrier to using library services is considered to be opening hours (48% of all the themes within the comments) followed by limited choice/range/new books (12%).

Example comments: Barriers to using library services

- *The selection of books does not seem to change as often as it did in the past.*
- *The more you reduce a service or limit opening hours, the less people use it.*
- *Not enough late opening on weekdays for working people to access.*
- *A slightly later opening time one evening and opening on Saturday afternoon may benefit full-time workers who wish to access the library.*
- *I work full time Mon-Fri so the only time I can get to the library is on a Saturday morning which isn't always possible. One evening a week where it is open slightly later would make such a difference, or a way to drop off returned books outside of opening hours. When we lived in Gloucestershire last year their library services offered free reservations from any library in the county, which given my local library was a tiny community one made a big difference. It would be brilliant if Shropshire could offer this too, but I do appreciate that budget/transport constraints mean that this may not be possible.*
- *The interior of Shrewsbury Library is shabby (carpets etc!), and the toilets are inadequate.*
- *Find it quite depressing sometimes to see how library services in Shropshire and the UK generally are deteriorating under austerity and neglect, whilst I experience amazing public and academic libraries in Germany and the Nordic countries which I visit regularly. Libraries there are still valued, respected, funded, and most of all, used by most of the population.*
- *I find some of the holiday events for children/young people rather disruptive and noisy - I'm happy to see young readers being encouraged but impact assessment on regular users is also required. I find far too many non-library events at Bridgnorth - knitting groups etc... which don't link to the library as a space for reading, writing and research. Some of these monthly/fortnightly events are highly disruptive.*
- *I don't like the charge for reserving a book from another library. I would prefer access to the whole catalogue and free request/reservation. I do not need to access the physical books during the choosing process. But children do need to access physical books to encourage reading.*

- *I have recently been forced to use a wheelchair. Although Whitchurch library is well laid out sadly there are often large pieces of furniture i.e. tables quite close to the shelves. Which while not impeding someone on foot creates too narrow a space for me to navigate thus preventing me from reaching some bookshelves.*
- *The reliability of the computers! It is not unknown for me to have to drive to wales to use a computer!*

Positive comments (no dislikes or barriers):

- *Nothing I don't like about library services in Oswestry.*
- *Bridgnorth library is excellent. The premises are spacious and attractively presented. Information about the area and what it offers is clearly presented and the staff are always pleasant, helpful and always knowledgeable.*
- *Everything about Wem Library and the mobile library are very much needed in this rural area, especially as public transport isn't available anymore where I live.*

Following questions asking about areas or dissatisfaction and dislikes and barriers, it was important to also ask survey respondents about the things they like. The survey included the question 'What do you like most about our library services?'. There were 570 comments and many people covered more than one theme within their comment. Table 6 displays the results. The staff at libraries and the welcoming atmosphere they create are the most common thing people like about Shropshire libraries, this is followed closely by the library resources/books. In many ways it is important to read all the comments to get a real feeling for people's views. The example comments included below provide a flavour of the types of comment provided.

Table 6 Comment Themes – Things people like most about library services

Theme	Number	%
Staff/ welcoming atmosphere	255	36
Books/loans/resources	234	33
Location/ convenience/ facilities	140	20
Groups/ events	29	4
Mobile Library	22	3
Computers	12	2
Information Services	12	2
Total	704	100%

Example comments: Things people like most about library services

- *The friendliness and approach-ability of staff who are always happy to help.*
- *Oswestry library is a lovely friendly library. All staff most helpful. I only came to live in Oswestry 18 months ago and obtained a lot of information from the library and have made new friends from some of the groups they hold re Chatter Natter and Books Aloud. Also computer sessions very good and excellent choice of books.*
- *Wem library - the staff are welcoming, helpful and knowledgeable. I am researching and writing a book and use the computers a good deal. The newspaper archive is especially useful.*
- *My children and I love Church Stretton library and visit every week. SUPER staff, a lovely setting and space, and great range for us to choose from. We feel so welcome and wanted there and would be lost without it.*
- *I was enjoying the rhyme time with my Granddaughter. Jenny told us about the book bag. I joined up for my Granddaughter - she loved the book bag and the folk-singing week we took 10 toddler books.*
- *Apart from borrowing library books on a regular basis, there is a social element to being in the library, sometimes seeing people I know and exchanging thoughts on various books and authors. In particular, I think the provision made for the pre-school children is excellent - introducing them to books / stories, learning the boundaries of behaviour in their environment and hopefully learning and remembering something in the process.*

- *I have used libraries regularly all my life and they have added greatly to my knowledge, writing ability and many leisure activities. It is a positive service - most public services are not. It brings people together. It is everywhere so if I am away from home, I can use any local library. An excellent service I would pay more for.*
- *For information; to know they are available at a nominal charge. From a personal point of view being retired and widowed, volunteering gives me a chance to meet up with others; finding their preferences on reading matter and generally mixing and chatting. It gets me out of the house to do something positive. A lifeline.*
- *The library service is a very valuable service. It can be used by everyone in the community from the young to the old. So good value for money especially in Bishops Castle as this has one of the highest rates of users both young and old. You can see this if you regularly visit as I do. It can be used for different reasons such as recreational, education, fact finding, hobbies etc. Reading is an excellent way to stimulate the brain and keep it active. As everyone would agree this is so important. It has a social aspect too especially important in the countryside such as Bishops Castle. Rural communities need a good library service as public transport can be limited. The elderly cannot carry large numbers of books on and off a bus with their shopping. Young people need to be encouraged to pick up a book and read it. A library gives them this opportunity and costs the parents nothing. Books are good for your mental health, they can help relax you, lose yourself for a while and help you think better. Keep all our libraries open and I believe you should actually invest more money in them not less. I am sure you could find ways of bringing revenue in such as advertising for people, doing exhibitions for paintings and crafts. Some companies may like to sponsor your local library.*

Communication was also included as theme within the consultation survey, to inform future work and the library strategy. A key question was 'How do you usually find out about library services and information?'. The results suggest people are using multiple methods to find out about library services. Chart 12 highlights that library emails, newsletters and marketing is the most popular followed by use of noticeboards/leaflets and word of mouth. There were lots of other suggestions within the 'other, please describe' box provided. 60 people made a comment in the 'other' box and many made multiple other suggestions. These have been analysed and the results displayed within Table 7. A large number of people are visiting the library in person as their main method of finding out what is happening at their local library, others hear from Friends of the Library groups and another other category included library news within local newsletters.

Chart 12 Communication methods used to keep informed about library services

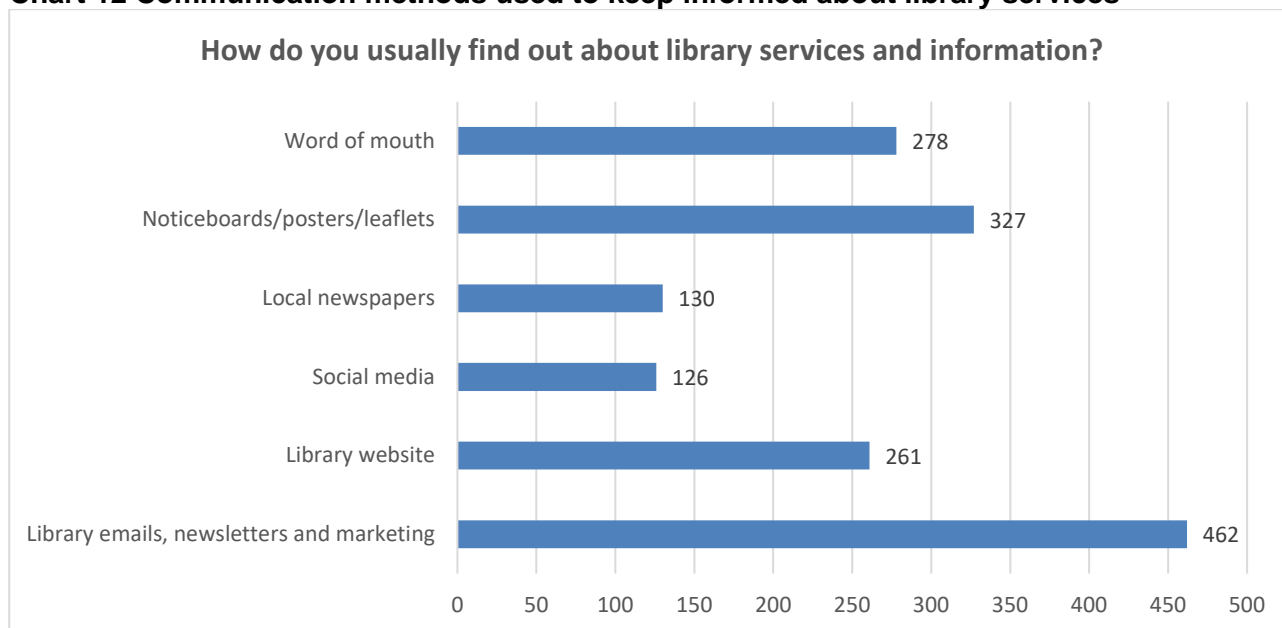


Table 7 Comment Themes – Other methods of accessing library communications

Theme	Number	%
In person/ visiting the library	55	62
Friends of the library	10	11
Local newsletters/ Parish Magazine	6	7
Council emails	3	3
Mobile Library Driver	3	3
Telephone	2	2
Website	2	2
Don't hear news at all	4	4
Other	4	4
Total	89	100%

Example comments: Other methods of accessing library communications

- *Probably more from the library staff than any of the above.*
- *Staff at the library. Ludlow staff are very helpful.*
- *From driver of library van.*
- *Member of Friends of Church Stretton Library.*
- *The email service is invaluable.*
- *I learnt about this survey from Mr Boddington's excellent blog about the Council.*
- *Friends of the Library emails.*

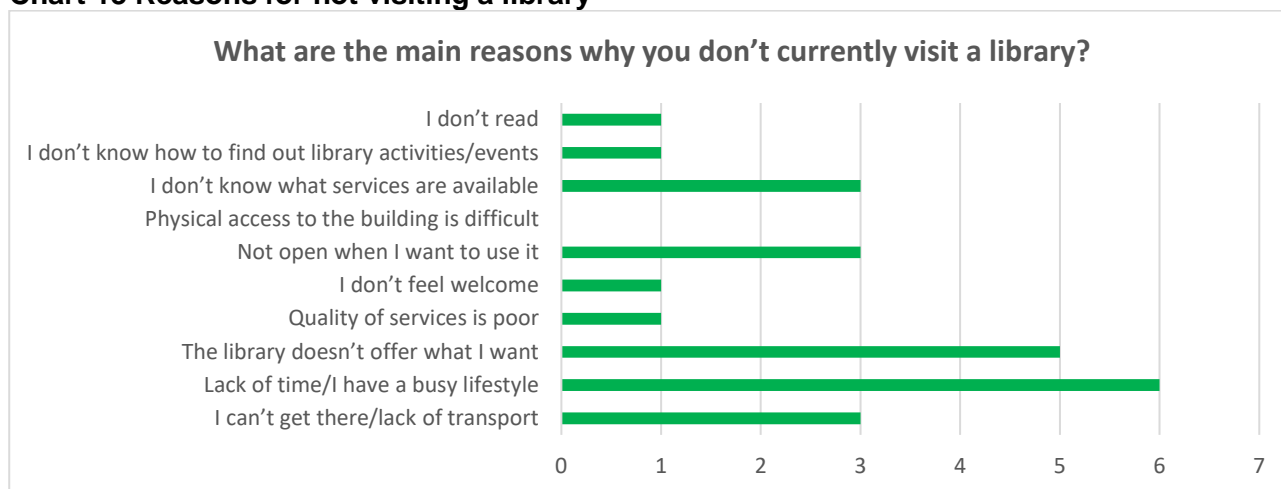
5. Feedback from non-library users

The survey was designed to also obtain feedback from non-library users and had two key questions from people who don't use libraries:

- What are the main reasons why you don't currently visit a library? and
- What, if any, changes or additional services are needed to encourage you to visit a library (or access services online) in the future?

Only 19 people, from the 909 total, indicated that they never visit a library so the information is limited. Chart 13 provides the information available. The main reason non-users give is that they don't have time to visit a library. A few people provided other reasons and mentioned using online services instead of a library.

Chart 13 Reasons for not visiting a library



11 of the 19 non-library users made comments when asked 'What, if any, changes or additional services are needed to encourage you to visit a library (or access services online) in the future?' The main change was evening opening/longer opening hours (3 comments). Other changes, all with 2 comments each, included improved range of books, Improved building facilities, better communication and new online services/technology.

Example comments: Changes to encourage library use

- *State of the art IT services to get children interested in books/reading. What will take a child off a computer game to visit a library? Interactive reading games, 3D/4D reading experiences.*
- *More current books, books from lists such as top 100 fiction of all time etc, and all of the books in a series rather than being able to read the first one but not the next.*
- *Find a bigger building, they are doing their best with the space provided and the resources they have, the library manager is also doing a good job, but I feel more priority should be given to longer opening hours and more professional staff i.e. a chartered librarian in each branch.*
- *Ref Mobile Library: The Mobile Library offers an excellent service. But, like and Ice Cream van, there should be ways of highlighting its arrival. And like busses there should be a "Library Stop" street sign with timetable. Ref On-Line Services: There needs to be better communication of what is available and how to access it. The Shropshire portal should have Library Services flagged up on the front page. Placing Libraries under 'Leisure and culture' might reflect the Portfolio holder's brief or be 'the correct' term to encapsulate Libraries, but it's a real turn-off. 'Leisure' makes reading is just for those with time on their hands; 'Culture' makes reading elitist. Just flag it up boldly: 'Library: Ideas & Facts'*

6. The Future and the Library Strategy

One of the main aims of the survey was to look ahead and obtain suggestions and ideas for shaping the future of library services. Three open questions were used to gain feedback. The first question was 'Libraries are changing in line with changing demands from library users. Describe your ideal library for the future...'. Table 8 displays the results. 626 comments were made, some included multiple themes/points. The top theme was that people don't want any changes and want libraries to stay as they are. This reflects the high levels of satisfaction with library services. However, the next few top themes from the comments highlight that people would like to see longer opening hours, an increase in the range of resources/choice, more community activities/facilities at libraries so that they form 'hubs' and building and facility improvements. Other themes included comments that people would like to see café facilities within libraries and more groups/activities/events. All these suggestions would require additional investment of resources into libraries, however, the example comments help to better illustrate the feedback received, they highlight that most people don't really expect significant changes or investment but emphasis on ensuring libraries are designed for, and open to everyone in the community.

Table 8 Comment Themes – The library of the future

Theme	Number	%
No change/ keep as is	132	18
Opening Hours and access	164	22
Increased range of resources	147	20
Community hub / facilities	81	11
Building and facility improvements	73	10
Café	47	6
Groups/events/activities	44	6
Online	31	4
Ideas and suggestions	16	2
Other	16	2
Total	751	100%

Example comments: The library of the future

No change

- *I am a traditionalist - I like things that work well and hate change for change's sake.*
- *By definition, a library is where all members of the public of any age can gain pleasure in reading, whether for educational needs, general information or pleasure, so why change a format which has stood us well in the past. Change is not necessarily for the best.*

Value library

- *Friendly staff, our visits (Me and my Downs Syndrome sister in our 40s) are a joy, very important, something we love together and never fails to cheer when times are hard. I think this is so for many users - libraries perform an important social service - one of those things that makes life worth living and probably helping to ward off mental health issues - undoubtedly I would say. A good choice of books- obviously. New books, classic, modern classics, non-fiction, poetry.*
- *I think Oswestry library have got it right. In the 18 months I have lived in Oswestry they have introduced new groups which are well attended. They also do lots for children both pre-school and for children in the holidays. They are doing a great job. I just want them to carry on with the good work.*

Community and inclusivity

- *Libraries are the heartbeat of communities. Shropshire Council should be proud of what they have on offer in their libraries.*
- *All things to all people. An online information, renewal etc service seems inevitable.*
- *Accessible to all - especially catering to and introducing libraries to the young and audio books to the elderly. Bishops Castle library as the ideal - spacious, welcoming, informative staff, strong friends of the library promoting events etc.*
- *Libraries are key public service providers and should therefore be available to all citizens - especially in rural and poorer communities.*

Ideas and suggestions

- *To stay open. Libraries are very important and need to remain. Things like the NatWest community banker every other Friday is an essential idea. More of this kind of thing.*
- *Encouraging children to read is very important in society. Libraries provide a massively important service in encouraging young people to read and they allow people to access reading material when they might not be able to afford to buy it. Libraries should therefore be welcoming to all people of assorted ages and backgrounds. I would like to see the events continue, which cannot be achieved unless there is a physical service rather than an online only offering.*
- *Very true there have been many technological advances made in our libraries in recent years and are a credit to all concerned. Sadly, though in this survey there is not mention to one of the libraries greatest assets and they are the frontline personnel. These very knowledgeable and friendly people perform and provide a sterling service for all. My question is being a library user what part will these heroes play in your plan in the coming years?*
- *More books films and CDs to borrow. Cafe for food and drinks. Storytelling for adults and children.*
- *A welcoming community hub where advice and support are readily available. A place where a variety of groups can meet, facilitated and/supported by library staff. A venue for community events, exhibitions and performances. The library should be open in the evenings on some days. Visitor information could be available on Sundays in the summer.*
- *Libraries have wonderful potential - if they have sufficient space and funding. They should be a central part of any community. A cafe, everyone likes a cuppa, and a place to read, good selection of books - new books very important. Newspapers and magazines are important too. Computers are essential, as is help for those who are not confident using them. Local art hung on the walls, local crafts for sale. Good space for small local groups to get together. Continuing children's story times and art sessions. Volunteer hub for the local community.*

- *A space which is attractive, accessible and welcoming to all and which encourages life-long learning and entertainment through access to printed and digital media. A space which retains strong links with other public service organisations such as the health service, police and mental health services.*
- *I see Libraries as places of lifelong learning, research, culture, and knowledge. Also, a community hub that provides information and activities across all age ranges. Libraries remove barriers to information and learning, provides access to community engagement and have the ability to improve people's mental health. Libraries provide an experience and a 'buzz' to explore the knowledge of our own and other worlds. A gift shop (books and local art) could support Shropshire funds, likewise, a cafe would generate income and provide a relaxing place to read.*

All survey respondents were given a space within the survey to make any comments they wanted to about the future of library services in Shropshire. A suggestion was that the comments could include consideration of any gaps in current services or good practice from other places. Table 9 provides the summary of the main themes from the comments. 407 people made comments in total and some made more than one main point within their comment. 37% of the points made within the comments were about keeping libraries open, protecting them through ongoing investment and highlighting the necessity of having a library within a community (particularly rural communities). Because the open nature of the question resulted in a range of responses to this question, the comments have been split into four main groups of examples: importance of libraries, compliments, ideas and good practice, and strategy/approach.

Table 9 Comment Themes – Other comments: the future of Shropshire’s library service

Theme	Number	%
Keep libraries open/ library needed in community	171	37
Idea or suggestion	95	21
Strategy/ Council's approach	56	12
Opening hours	35	8
Compliment for library or a service	29	6
Satisfied as things are	29	6
Comment general	25	5
Example good practice elsewhere	16	3
No real comment to make	6	1
Total	462	100%

Example comments: Other comments: the future of Shropshire’s library service

Importance of libraries

- *All the libraries should be kept open. They are particularly vital in rural areas, which might not have the public transport to reach larger centres.*
- *Provision needs to be maintained at current level especially regarding access in more rural areas and increased to facilitate threats to social cohesion.*
- *It is essential to maintain a good library service especially for people who can't access all the facilities at home. A home library service is essential for people who are housebound and mobile service for villages.*
- *I just wish that the government would value the importance of libraries to the same extent as they did 100 years ago. Libraries contribute to the education and literacy of the community.*
- *Please don't cut it back. Libraries were crucial to developing my love of learning and reading as a child and have continued to be important to me throughout my life.*
- *Losing our mobile library (Sabrina route) would leave many of our elderly readers unable to access books. We are a very small village with very few services and poor public transport.*
- *I feel the library is a real hub of information for people from all walks of life and social demographics. It can bring communities together as it is quite diverse in its content. A physical*

structure with amenities is important for those less well off or with less IT resources at home/ the elderly that are not as tech savvy.

- *The library on Church Stretton is such a community hub. Mothers and toddlers. Elderly folk. People who don't have computer internet access at home. Please don't take it away.*

Compliments

- *Our library in Albrighton is perfect in every way for many reasons. No changes required.*
- *Bishop's Castle library currently excellent & together with Enterprise House could be used as a template for good practice.*
- *Our library in Church Stretton is a pleasure to be in. It's a beautiful building with very pleasant and helpful staff. There are good talks and a popular book group. I would like the library to host a writing group.*
- *I find the staff at Shrewsbury library excellent in all ways and for me no gaps in the current service.*
- *Oswestry is a beacon of good practice.*
- *Shropshire libraries are the best compared to Oxfordshire, Reading and Cornwall.*

Ideas and good practice

- *Closer partnerships with local schools and colleges. I know the Library in Oswestry already has good relationships with local schools, but I've seen libraries that do a good job of being formal venues for outreach and community teaching from larger academic institutions: Glyndwr University, Chester University, Shrewsbury College, etc. All these could be potential teaching partners.*
- *Oxford libraries run a language cafe-time when foreigners have a chance to practise English conversation, for English people to have a chance to meet speakers of other languages-it is great for inclusivity and integration. Would these be appropriate in Shropshire?*
- *Stronger links with schools to establish the idea of lifelong learning. Highlight local authors to encourage writing and reading. Equip one of the Mobile Library vehicles especially for young people. Liaise with the Youth Services and establish a regime of calling on each of the youth Clubs once a year to show what's available and how to access it. Give membership to each primary school child.*
- *Easily accessible with appropriate opening hours. A wide range of books and an efficient arrangement for inter-library loans. A welcoming atmosphere with a good use of space. An outgoing approach which encourages people, especially children, to use the facilities. The library in Chester is a good example of a versatile approach.*
- *I've heard of initiatives like tool libraries etc - perhaps the library can be used to reduce the need to buy stuff?*
- *Shrewsbury Libraries app, to make loaning resources easy. In the college I work at, the students use 'My Cirqua' app to loan/request books.*
- *Free inter-loans from other libraries as in Devon and Gloucestershire.*
- *Engagement with socially excluded and reading schemes.*
- *Access for the elderly to choose books to read. I have noticed that when very elderly a major pleasure for many is the ability to read. It is my belief that this enhances emotional well-being at a challenging time.*
- *I travel a lot, and so see how public libraries are adapting in plenty of other countries. From the US, in particular, I see projects such as repair cafes and libraries-of-things helping to foster sustainability and broaden the community remit of libraries. I also see the way that Libraries are able to use and manage larger-scale subsidised meeting spaces to facilitate niche conferences and events that sometimes struggle to find venues - I've seen libraries hosting autism-friendly film screenings, disabled-friendly sports, gaming club meets, 3D-printing enthusiasts meets, etc. I know it's a bit of a cliché now, but cafes and eating spaces seem an important part of this as well. I've seen cafes that are partnerships with ethnic communities, social welfare projects, spiritual communities, etc. These places can offer low-cost, good quality food - but also critically important "hang out" spaces for people with few other options. But what I've also seen in the cases where such cafes work well is an honest understanding of the informal social care such spaces offer, and correct staffing with trained personnel who can deal appropriately - and*

meaningfully - with all that brings with it. Perhaps too "big scale" for Oswestry, but something that could be talked about.

Strategy and Council approach

- *It needs a fundamental shift in thinking nationally and among local decision-makers: do we want libraries contributing to an educated and informed population and to cohesive and supportive communities, or do we let libraries deteriorate further because we don't care or imagine a commercial solution is always better?*
- *Making sure children's activities are an important part of the strategy - we need to ensure that new readers and library users are encouraged.*
- *I would like to see a commitment to a more equitable funding system that is designed to make all our libraries places for Shropshire to be proud of, and all the professional staff supported and trained.*
- *Accepting that money is tight it may seem that libraries are not important enough to merit proper funding. That is so foolish. The services are vital to so many sections of the community - the young, so they learn the love of books which will help them throughout their education and life, the old who can find support and company - in the books and in the library service across the board. And everyone in between for whom libraries can add interest and joy to their lives.*
- *I would hate an automated library - face-to-face contact is really important for community facilities. Not just for getting advice but also for those people who are isolated and lonely.*

A specific question was included within the survey to encourage people to comment on the new library strategy and what it should contain. Although further consultation/engagement is planned, this more open style of questioning was designed to get a feeling of what is most important to community members. There were 305 comments. Table 10 summarises the feedback. Some of the comments included themes raised previously within comments to other questions. Opening hours was mentioned quite frequently and also many people didn't want to see any changes but hope libraries can stay as they are. The example comments highlight again, that people are really concerned that there will be further reductions in library services due to a lack of local authority budgets. This was a very strong concern highlighted throughout the whole survey within the comments made. Many people view the new strategy as a means to implement reductions in library services. The example comments have been grouped into two main themes: Investment in libraries and rural communities and ideas and suggestions.

Table 10 Comment Themes - Thinking about the new library strategy, is there anything you would like to see included?

Theme	Number	%
Rural community hubs	62	19
Investment	51	15
New ideas and suggestions	47	14
Books/Choice	35	11
Opening hours	27	8
Keep it as it is	25	8
Encouraging reading	21	6
Mobile library	12	4
Accessibility	14	4
Other	36	11
Total	330	100%

Example comments: The Library Strategy

Investment in libraries and rural communities

- *I would like to see more resources spend on libraries and staffing levels/ opening hours. You can only keep libraries vibrant and alive, if you invest and keep them accessible at all times.*

- *Forward planning, so libraries are not constantly feeling under threat every year because of uncertainty about money. A recognition that these services in rural areas are more than 'just' a library. They are part of the beating heart of the community.*
- *I think libraries are vitally important community spaces, that we should be expanding right now rather than contracting. We need more, not less, mutual/community support.*
- *Funding for smaller community libraries - these are vital especially in the most rural communities.*
- *More consideration for Tier 2 and 3 libraries which serve smaller and often financially struggling communities in more rural areas which have lost other services.*
- *Fairer funding across all three tiers - rather than charging people living in tier 2 and 3 areas twice, though surcharges on town/parish council.*
- *The current library spaces as community hubs and focal points as other traditional community places disappear.*
- *Continue with a community hub including council and registrar services etc.*
- *Continued movement towards being community spaces, offering more than just books. An emphasis on being welcoming, warm and friendly and providing quality care to our customers.*

Ideas and suggestions

- *Certainly, make use of the libraries for other purposes. Ludlow is likely to lose its central Post Office in the near future and it would be good to see that re-located in the Library building. If it's safe enough for the Local Council to use, then it could easily be used to provide a Post Office service.*
- *Cafe with a nice ambience and sitting areas which would attract people to building. Baby feeding/changing rooms. Community meeting rooms with regular free or low-cost events. Outdoor seating to have lunches or sit & relax? Play area for children/grandchildren?*
- *Having a small cafe in the library would encourage people to come in and they would then be able to see what is available. It would be good to have more sessions for children to meet authors or characters from their favourite books. Maybe to see a small charge for certain events in the library which might help to generate some income.*
- *I would like the personal library cards to have a bar code so you can store on your phone rather than be expected to card your card around all the time.*
- *Charging area for I-Pads and Phones etc.*
- *Talks/workshops from authors and illustrators, coffee shop, gift shop, creative writing courses.*

7. Organisational Responses

There were 8 written consultation responses from local organisations (many of those were town and parish councils). Many of these responses were comprehensive and detailed and each have been considered. To help highlight some of the feedback extracts have been included below under some key themes.

Extracts from written consultation responses

The consultation

- *Those attending the Engagement event in Bridgnorth on October 8th learned that such events would only be held in Tier 1 LibrariesNo notifications of the Consultation had yet been sent to Tier 2 and Tier 3 Libraries.*
- *We welcome the launch by Shropshire Council of a new consultation exercise on the future of libraries in the county..... We are concerned that the lack of publicity about the public consultation will mean people taking part in the consultation will be mainly from Tier 1 Library users.*
- *We have concerns about the sparse publicity about this consultation...*

- *As a Friends of Library group we are disappointed that Shropshire Library Service did not notify us of this consultation, despite the fact that the online documentation for this consultation says they want to hear from Friends of Library Groups.*

The value and importance of libraries

- *Provision of library internet access has become even more crucial for those who do not have access at home, particularly given the increasing reliance on web-based access to government and local government services.*
- *Shrewsbury Library: The building has a very high historic value due to its connections with Charles Darwin; it is amazing that the very room that Darwin studied in continues as a place of learning. I cannot think of another public library in the UK that has such nationally important academic connections apart from possibly Karl Marx at the British Library...*
- *Bishop's Castle Library is at the heart of our community. Its co-location with other community, social and business services in Enterprise House is highly valued....The Library plays a critical role in child development and adult education, as well as providing access to the internet and the www. It is an institution that underpins thriving communities in southwest Shropshire.*
- *We believe that the library is not a luxury: it is a practical tool and vital public space for individuals and families. It is a resource for parents with young children, for school children without a place to work at home, for job seekers trying to gain new skills and employment, for elderly people living in isolation, for community groups and, increasingly, an incubator for new ideas and businesses to come to fruition.*
- *Libraries will continue to have an important role in providing information to the local community. This includes information to help people to stay healthy, live with long-term medical conditions and be signposted towards reliable information on the internet....*

Concerns about the tiered approach

- *The Parish Council contends that the funding assumptions underpinning this tiered Strategy are neither sustainable nor fair, particularly to the town's parishes and community organisations, in respect of both Tier 2 and Tier 3 Libraries. This is because the households in those parish & towns would be contributing not only to the funding of Tier 1 libraries, through the county council tax, but also increasingly funding their own libraries through local council tax...*
- *Our experience suggests that the 2018 strategy of attempting to outsource the hosting and management of Tier 2 Libraries is neither practical nor feasible.*
- *....the funding assumptions underpinning the three-tiered Strategy are neither sustainable nor fair with the service also being used by residents from other parish area.*
- *We have always had concerns about the inequalities produced by a strategy in which libraries in the largest (Tier 1) towns would continue to be fully funded by Shropshire Council through council tax income collected from across Shropshire, with smaller towns being expected to pay again for their Tier 2 Libraries from an additional local council tax.*
- *...suggests a need to revisit the rigid distinctions between libraries in different tiers, so that the additional costs to library users is spread more fairly across the county.*
- *...the Council strategy – supporting libraries in the 6 largest towns – is wholly misconceived. The larger towns have a population or tax base sufficient to support their library and, indeed all the other services which the Unitary Council has withdrawn from the rural market towns....*

Concerns about transfer of responsibility to small organisations

- *Over the last three years, Shropshire Council has undertaken to transfer the funding and management to the Parish Council. Despite having supportive residents, willing to contribute some funding, it is difficult to expect a small local community to take on the employment of staff, with all of the risks and uncertainties associated with sickness and retirement liabilities.*

- *Only small community groups are likely to want to operate Tier 2 Libraries as there is no profit to be made. These groups will be too small to take on employing staff, running a payroll and managing pensions.*
- *Bishop's Castle Town Council has, very responsibly, tried to step in where Shropshire Council has withdrawn. The result is the highest precept in the county: £215.*
- *Having a Tier 2 library, Church Stretton is testimony to the unworkability of this approach. Over the last three years, Shropshire Council has undertaken a procurement exercise, seeking to transfer the funding and management to a community organisation in the town. Despite having a well-supported Friends of the Library, willing to contribute some funding, it has foundered on the impracticability of expecting a small local community organisation to take on the employment of staff, with all of the risks and uncertainties associated with sickness and retirement liabilities.*

The value of volunteers and Friends Groups

- *We have found since the end of the formal process we have been able to develop more productive relationships with Shropshire Library Services, the Town Council, and other partners. We therefore recommend a partnership approach rather than formal tendering exercises in future attempts to engage community and other local players in supporting the running of library services.*
- *A strong Friends of Church Stretton Library Group not only contributes funding to the Library's core book lending role, it has also developed a broad programme of activities for all ages based in the Library.*
- *We advocate a more flexible approach that supports local communities in library fundraising activities, and is responsive to the fundraising capacities, and pressures on, different places and populations.*
- *We recommend the setting up of a network of Friends of Library groups so that representative from different groups can meet, learn from each other's experiences, and support individuals wanting to start a new Friends group in their local community*
- *As a Friends Group we see ourselves as having a crucial role in enabling local communities to develop imaginative strategies for securing the future of libraries as the hub of communities..."*

The new strategy

- *We affirm that Shropshire Council's policy should be reversed in the interests of equability. Shropshire Council constantly urges 'Rural Proofing' on the government – rightly so – but it does not rural proof its own policies.*
- *...it is anticipated that the Library Service is to be entirely funded and managed by local community groups within five years – this needs to be reconsidered in the Strategy Review....this proposal is not feasible...*
- *...it is hoped that Shropshire Council will undertake a fundamental re-appraisal, particularly about a more equitable and sustainable way of funding and managing the Library Service into the future.*
- *The Town Council urges Shropshire Council to undertake a fundamental reappraisal of its proposed approach, such that it shares the financial responsibility more equitably across all town and parish councils and is more capable of achieving the declared outcome of sharing the benefits countywide, through not only joint financial but also joint managerial arrangements with local councils and community organisations*

The more formal responses contain some common themes and it is important that these issues are fully explored in advance of both designing and undertaking the second stage of engagement and consultation.

8. Conclusion

There was a fantastic response to the phase one engagement survey designed to obtain feedback prior to designing a new library strategy. The written responses received were also helpful and highlighted the issues organisations would like to see covered within the new library strategy. The volume of responses, and the comments made, highlight that local people, overall, value library services and members of the public are very satisfied with the services libraries offer.

There was a strong sense of fear that a new strategy could bring further reductions in service due to the impact of austerity on public sector budgets. Areas of concern include reductions in library opening hours, reduced choice within the library resources available and lack of investment in buildings and equipment/facilities. Organisational concerns cover the tiered approach within the existing strategy and the allocation of resources, reliance on town and parish council support and small community organisations; and the lack of a clear, long term and sustainable plan for library services. There are calls to review the tiered approach and reconsider some of the principles upon which the current library strategy is based.

Organisations support a partnership approach to the future of library services would like to see greater collaboration within the next stages of work. There is a recognition of the role volunteers and Friends of Library groups can play and responses highlight that the future of libraries must be designed through a community approach.

Feedback suggests that members of the public would like to see greater investment in libraries. People see library services as an essential part of rural communities, providing spaces that offer social interaction and attract all members of the community through an inclusive approach.

The ideas and suggestions within the survey responses suggest, whilst people do not want to see significant changes within libraries, they would like to see greater stability and the role of libraries strengthened as community spaces offering a range of services at the heart of Shropshire's rural communities.

Please note that a short summary report is also available.

Analysis undertaken by the Feedback and Insight Team, Information, Intelligence and Insight Unit, Shropshire Council 14 November 2019. SD